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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the development and operation of the scheduling plan developed by the Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, school system. The plan, designed to maximize the use of available facilities and to expand the curriculum offering, combines a fifty-hour instructional week, alternative learning opportunities throughout the community, an expanded curriculum of 200 course offerings on an elective trimester basis, late afternoon and evening classes, the near elimination of study halls, and visiting instructors for specialized subject areas. Pupils attend classes on a required basis four days a week during the A-Block Session (8 a.m. to 2 p.m.) and are encouraged to elect into the B-Block (2 p.m. to 5 p.m.) and C-Block (7 p.m. to 9 p.m.) classes. On the fifth day, pupils are encouraged to participate in a Career Opportunity Program in which they work in hospitals and schools as volunteer aides. (Author/DN)

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Flexible Scheduling/Extended Day

THE SHREWSBURY PLAN

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This report is intended to provide a general view. Anyone desiring more information is invited to contact:

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

With the exception of the personal statements by Superintendent Agard and Mrs. Hakim and Mr. Corazzini, the articles herein were written by John Guy Laplante. The holder of a graduate degree in journalism, he was a newspaper reporter and editor for many years and taught journalism at the college level. He is the head of John Guy Laplante Associates of Auburn, Mass., which specializes in institutional communication. He spent several months conducting interviews and writing the report.

A Word from the Superintendent

There are many ingredients that make up the formula for the successful development of this program.

Shrewsbury's Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program would not have been designed and developed if there had been adequate instructional facilities to handle the expanding enrollments and needed curriculum changes.

The first ingredient is need.

The Shrewsbury Plan, designed to maximize the utilization of available facilities and to expand the curriculum offering to meet the needs of the pupils, combines a fifty-hour instructional week, all classes meeting four times a week for approximately one hour, alternative learning opportunities throughout the community, an expanding curriculum of 200-course offerings on an elective trimester basis, late afternoon and evening classes, the near elimination of study halls, and visiting instructors for specialized subject areas, into a Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program.

Pupils attend classes on a required basis four days a week during the A-Block Session between 8:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. and are encouraged to elect into the B-Block afternoon 2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. and C-Block evening 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. classes. Pupils attending B and C Block classes are excused from an equal number of A-Block study hall assignments. On the fifth day, pupils are encouraged to participate in a Career Opportunity Program working in hospitals and schools as Volunteer Aides.

Approximately 80% of the school's enrollment of 1,600 pupils are in attendance at one time during the A-Block schedule and during the second trimester of the 1972-73 school year, 500 pupils were enrolled in the B and C Blocks.

The Contract with the Teachers' Association provides for thirty-three hours and fifteen minutes per week and teachers are assigned into the A-Block 8:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. session. Teaching assignments in the B and C Blocks are filled from an application list of staff members and visiting instructors. Salary is a contract hourly rate for the twelve-week trimester assignment.

Transportation is provided on a once daily to and from school basis for those pupils living more than one and one-half miles from the school for the A and B Block sessions. Pupils attending the C-Block evening classes provide their own transportation.

The Hot Lunch Program offers breakfast, a snack bar, and a multi-menu Class A lunch.

The second ingredient is a positive and encouraging climate by the policy-making board.

It is the belief of this Superintendent that the Shrewsbury Plan could not have developed and become operational had not the School Committee fostered and encouraged a creative educational climate for innovative and alternative approaches to problem solving. The School Department philosophy where staff members are permitted to design and test pilot programs with the knowledge that total success is not always expected or demanded resulted in the building block units with which the new program was developed.

The effective involvement of student and parents with the teaching staff throughout the design stages together with the continued high level of flexibility in the first operational year as problems developed and were solved continues to excite the participants.

The citizens of the community have supported the program and given it a chance to evolve. The final ingredient for the development of a successful program is the total involvement of management, the professionals, the customers, and the owners of the enterprise.

Irving H. Agard

The Shrewsbury Plan: An Overall Look

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What is the Shrewsbury Plan?

It is a high school program formally called Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program (FS/EDP) which was launched in September, 1972, with a two-pronged objective.

First, it attempted to solve a short-term building shortage; incoming classes for the next several years would crowd existing facilities, but this crowding would eventually be alleviated naturally by a declining birth rate. Second, it intended to liberate the program of studies by freeing students from the narrow, limited "tracking" system previously in effect and permitting them a more personal choice from a much more generous offering of courses, depending on their individual abilities, their tastes and inclinations, and their career interests.

Had there not been a potentially acute building problem, probably FS/EDP would never have been conceived. It was when called upon to stretch their imaginations for a satisfactory alternative to building an addition to the high school that a four-man committee of school administrators developed a plan which, while accomplishing the short-term aim, would also improve the education offered in the high school. As details of the Shrewsbury Plan crystallized, it became obvious that the projected program would be a significant departure from conventional high school programs.

The Shrewsbury Plan has several distinctive features. Each is important by itself, but none would have worked satisfactorily alone. It was the total package which made the Shrewsbury Plan successful. Let us discuss the key elements one by one.

The Four-Day Week. This was the first feature to be designed in the developing Shrewsbury Plan. By abandoning the traditional five-day school week in favor of a four-day week, the town would no longer be faced with the need to

A definite advantage is that the new program has made it possible to more than double the course offerings.

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An important feature of the plan is having courses scheduled in three time blocks: mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

build an addition to accommodate a temporary influx of students, yet in no way would the present facilities impose a hardship on them.

The basic arithmetic made the idea appealing. If on any given day 20 percent of the students were absent, then the present building could very easily accommodate the other 80 percent, yet 100 percent of the students would be getting their education every week.

Not all students have the same day off. At first this was difficult for townspeople to accept. "How come Johnny isn't in school today?" neighbors would ask as they saw Johnny go off to a part-time job, or mow the lawn, or sunbathe on the lawn. Townspeople had to get the message that Johnny wasn't playing hooky. His absence was legitimate.

Once the idea of the four-day week was adopted, the committee had to make sure that students received a full measure of instruction. This was important in order not only to meet the basic requirements imposed by the state, but to give the town's boys and girls a quality education. The existing program of study periods in school was largely ineffective, it was felt. They were a genteel way to keep students from roaming the corridors and little else. By eliminating them, the committee believed it could gain the extra time to compensate for a day less of classes. As finally adopted, the program called for a schedule of four 53-minute classes a week in a course, for a total of 212 minutes. Previously a student had five 42-minute classes a week, totaling 210 minutes.

The four-day week became the keystone of the Shrewsbury Plan.

The Extended Day. Inspiration struck again. If the school week could be shortened, by the same token couldn't the school day be lengthened? If yes, then the school could offer a far greater variety of courses. This was desirable because an amplified curriculum would make it easier for students to look into subjects of particular interest, to explore new areas, to do advanced work in certain fields, to return to some courses for reinforcement, to pick, to choose, sample, discover -- in a word, to tailor their high school education to their own needs.

In the fall of 1971 observers had noted a gratifying occurrence. The high school had introduced several industrial arts and physical education courses in the evening. They were open to high school students. Students had to provide their own transportation. Nevertheless, the turn-out was impressive, with some 80 boys and girls taking advantage of the offerings. They liked the idea of choosing supplemental courses on their own and seemed motivated to do well in them.

During the committee's brain-storming sessions, the experience was recalled. It led the committee to believe that yes, lengthening the school day would be a sound decision. After much deliberation, a three-part school day was designed. The traditional segment, labeled Block A, runs from 8 to 2. Block B is in session from 2 to 4. Block C lasts from 7 to 9. Students elect Block C courses on their own.

It's this dramatic extension of school hours which made it possible to expand the curriculum from some 90 courses to 200-plus, permitting such offerings as Italian, Insurance and Investments, Watercolor Techniques, Creative Stitchery, Taxes, Architectual Drawing, Consumer Mathematics, Experimental Physics, Oceanography, and Asian Studies. Approximately a third of the students have Block B courses.

The question is asked, How can a teacher's schedule be agreeably designed to bracket three such blocks? The teacher's 33-hour week has been preserved. All teachers work consecutive hours, some from 10 to 4 instead of 8 to 2. Evening teaching is elective; teachers receive supplemental stipends for evening courses as well as for any day courses beyond their 33-hour base.

The extended day greatly facilitates securing professionals to teach specialized courses. An example is a physician who teaches Introduction to Medical Science. Another is a certified language teacher, whom the school could not justify hiring on a full-time basis, who teaches a course in German during Block B.

Continued on next page

Flexible Schedule. The "track" system, which routed students through tightly charted four-year programs titled "College Prep", "General", "Commercial", "Vocational", was abandoned in favor of a much freer and more personal selection of subjects. The emphasis now is on what courses rather than what programs.

Certain basic requirements must be met. A total of 54 units is required for graduation. Of these, 36 units are compulsory: 12 in English, 6 in Social Studies, 6 in Mathematics, 6 in Science, and 6 in Physical Education. The remaining 18 are elective. It is to be noted that students are free -- indeed, encouraged -- to take more than the 18, and a number do. Seniors, for instance, average six courses rather than the required five.

Furthermore, students have a much greater choice within the stipulated 36 credits.

The Flexible Schedule is truly an approach to the ideal of not only designing a personal program of study for each student, but letting a student complete the sequence at his optimum pace. It is entirely possible for highly motivated students to finish the nominal four years in three, or if preferable, to take five years. It has been satisfying, for instance, to see several drop-outs return to fulfill diploma requirements at a more comfortable pace, all while maintaining their jobs. Similarly, we have Junior High Students enrolled in afternoon courses, and adults in evening courses.

Trimesters. Another important innovation was to substitute a trimester division for the previous semester arrangement. There are distinct advantages to having three 12-week segments rather than two 18-week segments. More courses can be offered, including one-time mini courses to satisfy a specific interest and advanced courses which carry a sequential program in certain fields a step or two higher. They also permit a student to explore an interesting area without committing as much time to the experiment. Similarly, they facilitate remedial or repetitive work.

Career Opportunity Experience. This was a carry-over from an experiment which had proven itself the previous year. Qualified seniors had been allowed to take a day off from classes to explore career opportunities of their choice, whether in business, education, nursing, industry, etc. They were obligated to make up the school work they missed. They impressed the program supervisors by their enthusiasm and motivation. Academically, their performance seemed in no way impaired. If anything, as a group they were doing excellent school work.

The "fifth" day -- the free day -- of FS/EDP seemed a natural slot for the continuation and perhaps expansion of the Career Opportunity Experience.

A year's additional experience has re-inforced the conviction that the program should be developed even more. Some 60 students enrolled, working in hospitals, schools, offices, stores, and industrial establishments. The experience enabled some to conclude they wanted to pursue a career choice, and others to select a new one.

The Guidance Counselor. It was recognized from the very beginning that the role of the school guidance program would be intensified. With a much greater freedom of choice, it was important that each student have the benefit of professional experience to help him make sound decisions and avoid wasteful and unhappy ones. Accordingly, careful thought was given to how the guidance program could be incorporated best into FS/EDP.

Every student meets with a guidance counselor twice a year to discuss his plans and his program and to discuss choices. Also, guidance counselors are available throughout the year to discuss a student's particular needs. Guidance counselors hold office hours two evenings a week to make it easier for students to stop by with their parents. Parents are encouraged to take a stronger interest in the individual courses, sequences, and options open to their children. Regularly, group explanations are scheduled to make sure students understand the program.

These are the key features of the Shrewsbury Plan. As time goes on, they will be modified to meet changing conditions. They will be fine-tuned as experience deems necessary. As a whole, they have made FS/EDP successful to the satisfaction of most people. The Massachusetts Department of Education granted the town a waiver from the five-day school week as a pilot program and has renewed the waiver. Students are enthusiastic. The initial misgivings of some teachers and parents have to a large extent been assuaged. Scores of educators from communities near and far have written for details or visited the high school. The press has taken a great interest and has expressed its satisfaction.

The pressing problem of how to make our school accommodate more students has been solved.

But most important of all, more of our students seem to be getting a better education, and none a worse one. ■

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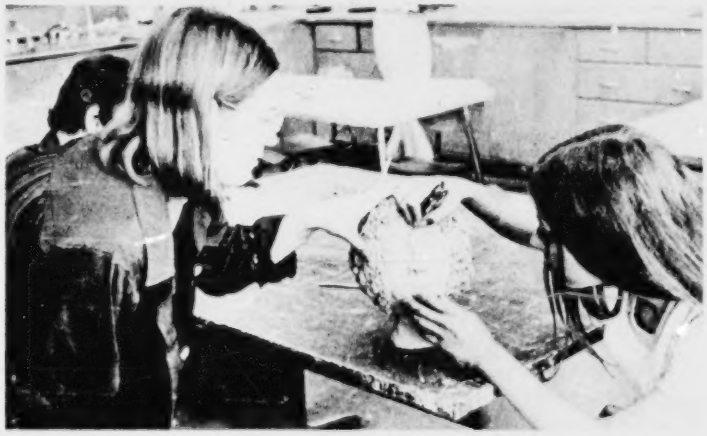

Major emphasis is placed on letting students progress at their best speed in subjects which they like.

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Shrewsbury: What Kind of Town Is It?

Outsiders who inquire about details of the Shrewsbury Plan invariably ask, "What kind of community is Shrewsbury?" The question suggests that they believe there is a close link between the plan and the community. They're right.

First a few general facts: Shrewsbury is located in central Massachusetts. It adjoins Worcester, with a population of 186,000 the second largest city in the Commonwealth, and to a large extent is a suburb of the city. The town has a population of approximately 20,000 people; most of the adults work in Worcester and use Worcester as the major shopping center. The town's population nearly doubled in the two decades between 1950 and 1970, an increase explained primarily by a relocation of many people from the city to the town. Other nearby suburbs experienced a similar growth. The town has a number of small industries, but it is primarily residential.

Statistics are enlightening, but they are worth little unless placed in perspective. Most interesting of all are comparative statistics. Education, income, and home ownership in the town are above average for the area.

According to a monograph of the Massachusetts Department of Commerce and Development, in 1960 the percentage of persons who had completed high school or more was 51.5 compared to 41.7 percent for the Worcester metropolitan area. Median income was $6,929 in comparison to $6,058 for the area, and incomes of $10,000 and over (the highest category listed) numbered 21.3 percent as against 14.4 percent. The largest occupational categories were professional and technical (14.5%), craftsmen and foremen (15.6%), and operators (16.5%). The median age was 31.6 compared to 33.2 for the area. Nearly 90 percent of the housing units were single units, and 84.4 percent were owner-occupied.

The town school system includes a senior high school, a junior high school, and six elementary schools. In 1972-73 there were 4,972 children in grades kindergarten through 12. An estimated 516 children attended private schools.

There were 275 teachers, with an overall ratio of 21.2 pupils for every teacher. A total of 62 percent of the 348 graduates in the Class of '72 went on to institutions of higher learning.

The town is well-known as the home of the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology, a research institution famous for the development of the contraceptive pill, cancer research, and work in several other fields of biochemistry as well. Included on its staff are more than 100 Ph.D's and M.D.'s.

Shrewsbury is an old town. It was settled in the early 1700's and incorporated as a town in 1727. It is a progressive town. It was one of the first towns in the area to adopt the limited town meeting, and it is one of the few towns to employ a professional town manager. It is also one of the few to have a municipal electric power department.

Conclusions are hazardous, but there's an excellent chance a poll of townspeople would indicate that the great majority like their town, are proud of it, and would recommend it as a pleasant community in which to live. ■

Municipal Office Building.

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The Problems That Cried To Be Solved

The high school was built for 1,200 students. In 1971 enrollment was nearly 1,500, with 1,550 scheduled for the following September.

The great need was space.

This was the dominant problem which faced the School Committee in 1971. It was in finding a satisfactory solution that it opened the door to the many new possibilities that became the Shrewsbury Plan.

"There was going to be another big bulge in the high school enrollment in September," explains Mrs. Nora Hakim, chairman of the School Committee at the time. "Concern was being expressed by teachers, administrators and the Committee. This is what we sat down to discuss. What we decided was to give the school department a mandate to organize a program which would not only give us physical space but provide students with broader educational opportunities."

Leo R. Corazzini, the chairman of the School Committee, says initially the emphasis was on planning for the bigger class which was about to move up from the junior high school.

"We had recently finished selecting a new superintendent," he says. "When we chose Mr. Agard in 1969 we told him he would face an over crowded situation and would have to come up with a solution."

The problem was very real. The high school was built to accommodate 1,200 students. In 1970 enrollment was up to 1,450 and still rising. Four "relocatable" classrooms were added the following January, but these gave only temporary relief. In September -- the very time when the School Committee was wrestling with the problem -- enrollment was nearly 1,500. In another year it would swell to 1,550. Yet the town's declining birth rate would bring up smaller classes in just a few years, classes which the high school could accommodate comfortably without a building addition.

"We studied the conventional alternatives and discarded all of them," says Mrs. Hakim.

"Build? That would be expensive and there really wasn't enough time. More relocatables? This didn't appeal to us. Double-sessions would have been too difficult for everybody. We even discussed a 12-month school year. But we felt we weren't ready for anything like that.

"We had a dual point. We were looking to extend space and enhance the curriculum at the same time. This was the crux."

Mr. Corazzini had the same reservations and misgivings. "I remember reading a magazine article at the time which enumerated the pro's and con's of 10 different school plans. I asked myself, 'Which of these would be best for Shrewsbury?' And do you know what? Not a single one seemed to be good for us."

Then the committee began looking into a single idea. By itself it was inadequate. But when it was teamed with first one other idea, and eventually several, it seemed to hold promise. A lot of promise.

That key idea was the possibility of a four-day week for students. If the school remained open five days, and students were scheduled on a staggered basis to use it only four days, then obviously the same building could serve substantially more students.

The idea wasn't new to the committee. As a matter of fact, it had been seriously proposed in 1969 by Robert F.

Lutz, committee chairman that year. The idea had been set aside. "It didn't catch our imagination at the time," recalls a member.

Mrs. Hakim remembers vividly when the pieces of the puzzle began to fit together. 'I was at home one afternoon when Mr. Lekas, the high school principal, stopped by to have me sign a diploma. He dashed in for just a minute -- Mr. Montecalvo, the vice principal, waited in the car for him."

Mrs. Hakim had recently attended a state convention of School Committee members and superintendents.

In discussions she had probed for alternative ways of scheduling as the key to unlocking both space and curriculum. She mentioned it to Mr. Lekas.

"He was very interested," Mrs. Hakim says. "In fact, he went out and asked Mr. Montecalvo to come in. The three of us went on talking for a long time. We seemed to realize we were looking into something with great meaning for Shrewsbury. When they left, I couldn't wait to talk to Mr. Agard.

"You see, we had been meeting one little crisis after another, solving them piece-meal. Now I felt we had an integrated approach -- it might be a break-through."

And she makes another observation: there happened to be in Shrewsbury at the time enough inspired people to envisage seriously a creative solution that would carry the town beyond the immediate problem of space into a new dimension of broader educational opportunity for all students.

Certainly the members of the School Committee gave far more than lip service to the notion of "progress." They had proven this by supporting several new high school programs.

There was the Career Opportunity Experience, which permitted qualified high school seniors to take a day off from school to explore career opportunities of their choice. And simultaneously they had authorized a series of industrial arts and physical education courses to be given in the evening. Students had to provide their own transportation. The popularity of the classes had surprised everyone. The School Committee had endorsed these experiments and had been gratified by their success.

"In October 1971, the Committee ordered us to take the twin ideas of a four-day week and flexible scheduling and see what kind of program we could devise," says Superintendent Agard. "It was a clear-cut mandate to come up with something new. Something that would really work."

Mr. Agard organized a task force that set to work enthusiastically. It included Mr. Lekas, Mr. Montecalvo, and Mr. James J. Dorsey, Jr., who as director of pupil personnel services directs the guidance and counseling program.

"All of us had some pet ideas," says Mr. Lekas, "and we tried to fit them into an overall program that would really be a step forward. Some of them complemented one another and made the program stronger. Others fell by the wayside."

"Necessity became the mother of invention," wrote the Citizens Advisory Group in a report later. "What started out as an 'administrative expediency' became a plan for maximizing the use of existing facilities and allowing for an expansion of course offerings."

Mr. Agard says that the task force felt this was a golden opportunity to focus on some real educational concerns. Do all pupils need four years to graduate from high school? Could a flexible program be designed to satisfy individual differences? To what degree are pupils able to make their own decisions and select their own programs? To what degree should they? Does learning take place only in the classroom? Only in groups of 15 to 25? Only in the presence of the teacher?

Possibilities were explored, and one by one they were fitted into the new program that was taking shape in the discussions of the talk force.

The four-day week would take care of the space program. Extending the school day with optional afternoon and evening sessions would make it possible to offer many more courses. Flexible scheduling would remove students from the restraints of the existing tracking system (college program, general program, industrial arts program, commercial program, etc.) and give them greater freedom for individual requirements. Replacing semesters with trimesters would simplify designing sequential programs all while making it easier for students to take mini courses. The free day would make the Career Opportunity Experience available to even more students. And the expanded offerings would let both teachers and pupils try new courses.

Superintendent Agard says, "Mr. Lekas went to his teachers and said, 'What new courses would you enjoy teaching?' Then he went to the students and asked, 'What new things would you like to study?' Some answers weren't realistic, but many were. We built up the curriculum from 80 courses to more than 200."

The task force met many times, worked long hours, made plans and changed them, studied, chose, rejected, discussed, argued. Finally it felt that it had a plan that not only solved the original problem of more space, but opened promising new avenues of growth to the town's boys and girls.

The School Committee adopted the program that winter and in the spring the Massachusetts Department of Education gave the town permission to try Flexible Scheduling/Extended School Day as a pilot program for one year.

The Shrewsbury Plan came to life. ■

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Overcrowding threatened to be a serious problem, but only for a few years because of a lower birth rate.

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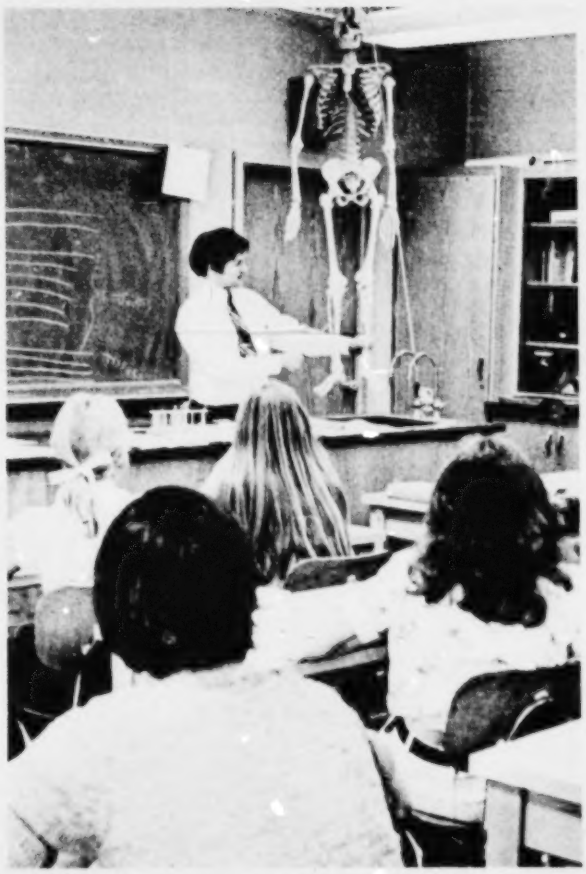
Some feared there would be less time for other activities.

The Tough Transition



Students have the same teacher for sequential courses.

The Shrewsbury Plan was a crash program.

The steering committee to study alternative programs was created in October, 1971. It began its work the following month and knew by December that Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program was the eventual package it would propose to the School Committee. And FS/EDP was launched in the high school in September 1972, and the whole process of studying alternatives, deciding on a concept, refining it into a program, and launching it in a school with 1,500 students took less than a year.

There are various opinions why things moved along so quickly.

"The School Committee was interested and kept up the pressure," says Superintendent Irving Agard.

"We were told that we would have to come up with a program -- a darn good one -- and get it going in the new school year," he says. "No and's, if's, or but's."

"Our key people were ready for a creative change and responded to encouragement," says Mrs. Nora Hakim, the School Committee chairman." They knew the status quo wasn't good enough and they were eager to develop something better."

"There were many reasons," says Leo R. Corazzini, the present chairman. "But two that I think of quickly is that Superintendent Agard is an innovative person, and that many, many people showed good will, particularly the teachers and the students. After all, they were the ones who would have to live with the program every day."

Certainly an important factor was that while the steering committee might be doing it, thinking in the quiet of the White Brick Building, it did its best to spread the word of what it was up to throughout the community.

An update on what was happening was the first business at every School Committee meeting. Informational meetings were held for students and parents. The press was given

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The four-day week cut enrollment by 20 percent a day, making the existing high school facilities adequate.

from Concept to Reality

the story as it unfolded. School administrators spoke to a variety of civic groups. "We were awfully busy doing all this," recalls Theodore Lekas, the high school principal.

"We realized our best efforts would be worthless if we couldn't get the program accepted by the town."

"We wanted people to become directly involved," says Mr. Agard. "This is why we asked teachers to suggest courses they would like to teach. This is also why we asked students to suggest courses they wanted to take."

Of the many features in FS/EDP the most troublesome to explain was the "fifth day" -- students would go to classes four days instead of five and have the fifth day off.

"Every high school student averaged one study period a day, plus one extra for the week," says Mr. Agard. "As part of the educational process the study periods were largely non-productive. They were a way to keep the kids from roaming the corridors. Furthermore, it was expensive to have teachers supervising study halls -- in effect, we had six teachers with an average salary of $9,500 doing nothing but covering study periods. So what we did essentially was bunch each student's study periods into a single day and say, 'Today, stay home.' This cut each day's attendance by 20 percent and gave us the extra room we needed."

It also provided the time for interested students to take part in the Career Opportunity Experience program.

As neat as it was, the idea was the one that took the longest to be accepted by the general community. Many parents, particularly in those families where both father and mother worked, worried about what their children would do on the day off. At meeting after meeting the first hand to be raised in the question period would ask, "How come you want to hold school only four days a week?" The public answers did much to sell the idea to the community.

Certainly an important step when the program was launched in September, 1972, was the creation of a Citizens Advisory Group, made up of nine members representing broad sections of the community. During the school year the committee interviewed a number of students, parents, teachers, and administrators about FS/EDP. Then it wrote a detailed report which considered every aspect of the program and assessed its impact on the various groups. It made careful mention of the program's apparent limitations as well as of its strong points, and on the whole expressed satisfaction with the program. In early May the report was mailed to the parents of all children in grades 6 through 11. Two public meetings were scheduled later in the month to discuss the report. A total of about 70 persons attended the meetings. The Citizens Advisory Group felt that the limited attendance was an indication of the town's satisfaction with the program.

Mrs. Hakim was intensely interested in the steering committee's progress. She spent countless hours at the high school, talking to students, teachers, and administrators. She was particularly intrigued with the possibilities of flexible scheduling.

"There had been many innovations in education over the years, but the structure and framework usually remained the same," she says. "School from Monday through Friday, so many hours a day for everybody, with pat courses. What we were doing was exciting because it was opening new doors."

Many persons, notably visitors from other school systems, have asked how such a large-scale change could be effected so rapidly. It's difficult to provide a simple answer. There were hard-headed people on the School Committee who wanted improvement. There were enthusiastic administrators. The program that was conceived had the advantage of previously tested elements. A careful timetable was adhered to. There was a strong public relations program. And there seemed to be a prevailing sense of what departures from tradition the town would accept and which it would not. ■

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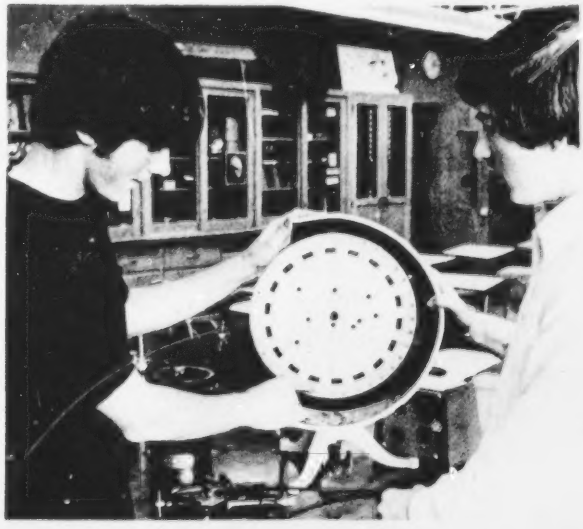
A, B, C Plus Trimesters Spread Wide the Horizon

Whatever plan the steering committee proposed to the School Committee would have to accomplish two goals. First, it would have to provide a solution for the crowding in the high school that would exist for several years. Second, it would have to give students a better education.

"Better" education: what's that? Many answers are possible. Shrewsbury had definite ideas of its own. To those grappling with the question, particularly School Committee members and administrators, it seemed urgent to bring about several changes.

"We felt it important to individualize our programs to a greater extent," says James J. Dorsey, Jr., director of pupil personnel services and a member of the steering committee. "If students felt the conventional four years was the right span for a high school education, fine. But if they wanted to go faster or slower, fine,too.

"We wanted to get away from the old tracking system, which started students on a narrow road in their freshman year (college prep, general, industrial arts, commercial, etc.) and kept them on it till they picked up their diploma and left.



Because study periods largely have been eliminated, students spend more of their school time in class.

"And we wanted to introduce many more courses in our curriculum. We kept saying our curriculum should be more meaningful and relevant. In fact, that's become a cliche in education: 'meaningful and relevant.' Well, how do you do that? By giving students courses which will answer their questions, give them information they need, fortify them with skills they desire, and prepare them for what they want to do in life.

To the Shrewsbury planners, a better education with such specifications demanded far more teaching periods in the school week than was provided by conventional scheduling. How to devise teaching blocks with more time segments, all while meeting state requirements and satisfying the demands of colleges and other institutions of higher learning Shrewsbury graduates would apply to, this was the difficult question.

Somehow stretching the school day seemed to be the answer, at least a good part of it. But would those directly involved -- students, teachers, parents -- accept such a solution?

"The previous year we had opened evening courses to high school students," says Superintendent Irving H. Agard. "They had to provide their own transportation. We didn't expect much of a turn-out. All of us were surprised by the impressive number who signed up."

This experience gave the steering committee encouragement that a longer teaching day would be feasible. In fact, after considerable experimentation and manipulation the committee settled on a school day with three distinct segments. Classes would be held from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. in what became designated in Block A, from 2 to 4 in Block B, and 7 to 9 in Block C. This stretched the school week from 30 hours to 46.

Attendance is mandatory in Block A, and optional in Blocks B and C. Students choosing offerings in Block C would be responsible for their own transportation.

Teacher assignments in such an extended day could pose a potential difficulty. But a satisfactory arrangement was devised: teachers continue to work 33 hours a week, some from 8 to 2 and others from 10 to 4. Teachers teach in the evening by choice and receive supplemental pay.

This was the first innovation. There were others. Study periods, which were more a holding action than a teaching device, were largely eliminated, making it possible to condense each student's school week from five days to four.

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In turn, the four-day week necessitated another change. Previously all classes met five times a week for 42 minutes, a total of 210 minutes. Because of the shorter school week, it was decided each class would meet for 53 minutes, totaling 212 minutes in four days. The extra time was gained by the elimination of study periods and home room periods.

A big change was the decision to abandon the semester system in favor of trimesters.

"This opened a new dimension," says Theodore Lekas, high school principal. "We now had three 12-week blocks to work with. Think of the possibilities: we could offer many more electives in all areas for both students and teachers. Students could take three sequential courses for a full year, or they could take three mini courses. If they found they liked a subject, they could pursue the interest; conversely they could drop a subject before committing themselves to it for a longer time."

Students must earn 54 units for graduation. One unit is one course per trimester. Of these, 36 must be earned in specific subjects: 12 (4 years, 3 trimesters) in English, 6 in Social Studies, 6 in Mathematics, 6 in Science, and 6 in Physical Education. The other 18 units are elective. Students in the first three years must take a minimum of five courses each trimester; seniors are allowed to take the number they need to graduate (it can be fewer than five). All students may take more than five, and a surprising number do.

The new program sounded promising. But how successful would it be in practice?

The first year's experience has been highly satisfactory. The curriculum more than doubled, with offerings increasing from 90 to some 200, as the result of suggestions by both students and teachers.

"Suddenly students were able to take courses in Black Studies, Urban Affairs, the American Woman in Politics," says Mr. Dorsey. "We had such new courses for students of varying abilities. We didn't have to promote them as 'meaningful' and 'relevant.' It was obvious they were."

Superintendent Agard cites many specific facts. Some 500 pupils, a third of all students, were enrolled in late afternoon or evening classes. Seniors averaged one more course per student than they did the previous year. Despite the longer day, school attendance rose, to 90.86 percent from 87.7 percent the previous year. Several drop-outs enrolled for courses in Block C to earn credits toward a diploma. A number of junior high students registered for courses in Block B. The availability of late afternoon and evening scheduling made it possible to enlist "outsiders" to teach special subjects, such as a physician teaching Introduction to Medical Science and language teachers from other communities teaching German and Italian, both previously unoffered.

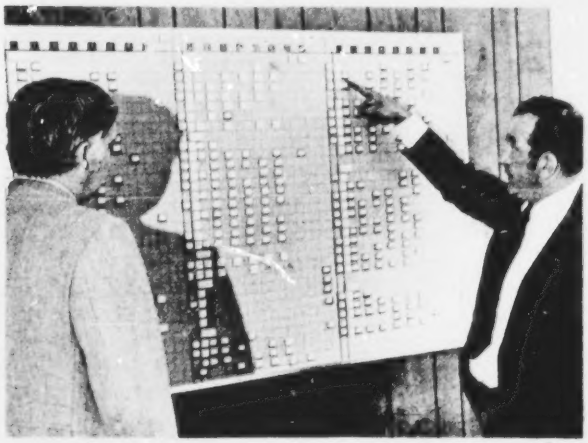
If students like a subject, they can explore it with additional courses. If not, they can drop it after only a brief investment of their time.

There were difficulties. The longer day made it difficult for students to carry-on some extra curricular activities and for school clubs and organizations to meet, but student enthusiasm usually made a solution possible. The many new options created some scheduling difficulties, but experience eliminated some of these; computerization in the future will simplify scheduling and substantially reduce the work.

Students themselves recognized a problem. Editors of the senior yearbook talked about it in print: "Unfortunately, there are some students, who due to the more flexible program, have become too relaxed and have failed to accept the responsibilities that always accompany freedom, whether it is in school or not. They have abused privileges and have not, for one reason or another, been able to handle the newly acquired freedom."

On another page they made another comment: "The program has provided an opportunity for students to enjoy a wider variety of courses which are most relevant to each student's interests. The atmosphere this year is more relaxed because we have been given more freedom. Freedom to choose our own courses. Freedom to come and go on Senior Privilege. Freedom to find what we want out of life and out of school."

This seemed to be exactly what the School Committee and the planners of FS/EDP had in mind. ■



Changing from semesters to trimesters opened the door to greater flexibility in programming.

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Some parents worried about what their children might do. *Abser*

The Problem - and

The concept of the four-day week has been both the boon and the bane of the Shrewsbury Plan. At the same time it solved problems and created some. The worst problem by far was the outcry from parents and townspeople, "What will kids do on their extra day off?"

The Citizens Advisory Group, created in September, 1972, by the School Committee to help explain FS/EDP to townspeople, recognized the problem immediately. In a comprehensive report prepared near the end of the program's first year, the CAG wrote: "The parents were bothered that the student for the most part thought of it as another 'Saturday' with few constructive plans for the free day. . . that it might be a lark."

In the same report, however, it mentioned a parent who noted that his daughter originally planned to use her free day for strictly recreational activities. She tired of this, and now she is working as a volunteer in the school offices during her day off.

Nobody will deny that many townspeople cannot accept seeing a high school student mowing lawns on his fifth day, baby-sitting, working on the family car, or playing golf without concluding that he is playing hooky. The notion is prevalent that if a student isn't attending high school Monday through Friday, something is wrong.

"It's been a big public relations problem," Superintendent Agard acknowledged. Then he smiled. "If only we could make people understand that in this plan every week has two Saturdays!"

Leo Corazzini, the School Committee chairman, said, "The fifth day was the big problem in the beginning. It still is. But it's getting smaller."

The fifth day comes up in any discussion of the Shrewsbury Plan -- what to do with it, how to explain it, why it came about -- and the reactions are varied and sometimes extreme.

Ernest Miller, a junior high school teacher who is president of the Shrewsbury Teachers Association, said very quickly, "Sure kids love the Shrewsbury Plan because of that fifth day. It gives a lot of them the chance to goof off."

Others say that absenteeism is easier because if you play hooky on Wednesday, few people can really tell whether it's illegal or not. After all, it *could* be your fifth day. But Joseph Montecalvo, vice principal of the high school, notes that average attendance for the year was 90.86 percent, as opposed to 87.7 percent the previous year. To him this suggests that if absenteeism is easier, then overall enthusiasm is higher.

A number of parents are delighted. Consider Mrs. Donald F. Robert, the mother of eight children. She had two in high school last year and has three this year. "Around our house children have to earn their own spending money after a certain age. Maureen and Darlene worked as baby-sitters on their fifth day. This permitted them to enjoy things like football games and dances on Saturdays. These are a big part of the high school experience, I think.

"This year Maureen will work in her father's store and Darlene will put in her day at the State Hospital, so it should be excellent experience. The four-day is a great idea."

She paused, then added, "If a child doesn't know what to do with an extra day off by the time of high school, then our problem is a lot bigger than just an over-crowded building."

The fifth day has created tensions in some families, particularly those in which both parents are absent from home during the day. Previously they were assured their children were in school and "out of trouble." Now some are not sure. There is concern about how Johnny or Susan is going to spend the extra day off.

From the very beginning the designers of the Shrewsbury Plan pointed out that just as it would give students considerably more freedom and independence, by the same token it would require greater responsibility.

n has not been the problem some people feared.

Most students are enthusiastic about the change.

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Challenge - of that Fifth Day

It's interesting to note the reaction of most students. A questionnaire about FS/EDP was prepared by Norman Limoges, a high school guidance counselor, for a representative sample of 200 students. To the question, "Has the four-day extended program helped you to become a better student?" they answered yes nearly 2 to 1.

About one aspect of the fifth day there is no question; everybody agrees that it has made it all the easier to carry on the high school's Career Opportunity Experience, and indeed, to make COE available to more students.

COE antedated the Shrewsbury Plan. Launched the previous year, it sought, in the superintendent's words, "to explore the idea that all learning need not take place in the school, with a teacher, or between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m."

What it proposed to do was permit a number of students to take a day from school every week to look into career opportunities. It was designed for college-bound students, as opposed to terminal students, some of whom were already participating in a conventional work-study program. COE students were obligated to make up the school work they missed.

Henry A. Sullivan, director of the COE program, said it was successful from the beginning. "Some 60 boys and girls took part. They worked as nurse's assistants, teacher's aides, 'apprentices' of various kinds in a number of institutions and businesses. They made up their school work without difficulty and seemed to have superior motivation. And the big plus was what they were learning out there in the world."

"It was probably our greatest achievement of that period," said Superintendent Agard. "It helped some students by letting them find out they had an aptitude for a certain field, and teaching others that they were going up the wrong alley -- the girl, for instance, who always wanted to be a nurse but who decided she didn't like the work when she was exposed to it."

It was recognized immediately that the four-day week would immensely simplify the operation of COE. And it has. Students no longer miss classroom work.

Mr. Sullivan, in a report prepared in April of the Shrewsbury Plan's first year, said 79 students were enrolled in COE. The majority were working in schools and hospitals as assistants to teachers and nurses. A few were exposed to career opportunities in an art museum, a radio station, a photography studio, and a veterinary hospital.

The program is bolstered by an advisory committee of 25 parents, in addition to a number of administrators, teachers, and students. Each sponsor -- that is, the student's on-the-job supervisor -- is asked to evaluate the student's performance.

"We take COE very seriously," said Mr. Sullivan. "Students are expected to be conscientious and responsible."

After its second year, COE seems to have established itself as an intrinsic part of FS/EDP. It has been decided that beginning in the second year of the Shrewsbury Plan, COE will carry credit. It is hoped that even more students will opt to participate.

The fifth day? It was hard to explain to townspeople in the beginning. Now it is generally accepted, but some people still misunderstand it. For a few students it provided further relief from the unhappy reality that school is for them. For a great number it opened the door to worthwhile opportunities.

The fifth day, of course, is the very heart of FS/EDP.

In a letter to the State Board of Education, Richard Cormier, chairman of the Citizens Advisory Group, said the initial problems seemed to be merely growing pains and would disappear.

A point that Mr. Cormier made in the same letter summarizes the group's findings well:

"That the program saved the community from a new bond issue or double sessions is only part of the story; that it has become a forward-looking innovative program is all bonus." ■

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Now the Guidance Counselor Is Even More Important

One of the major benefits of the Shrewsbury Plan is that it gives every high school student greater opportunity for individualized education.

The student is no longer constrained to pursue a course of education limited by the narrow margins of the old tracking system. He has greater flexibility of program. He has a wider choice of courses. He has the option of participating in the Career Opportunity Experience. And he can decide to complete his high school program in the conventional four years or, for good reason, take less time (three years, for instance) or more (five or six years if necessary).

That is one side of the coin. The other side is that these very features can make the Shrewsbury Plan difficult for students who are unsure of their interests and abilities, who lack motivation, or who find it hard to choose among their many options.

"FS/EDP offers a student an incredible smorgasbord," said James Dorsey, Jr., who as director of pupil personnel services is responsible for the guidance and counseling programs throughout the school system. "It's possible for a student to develop acute indigestion if he's not careful."

This was recognized from the beginning by the steering committee which shaped the Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program. Mr. Dorsey was a member of the group.

"We knew that the guidance and counseling services in the high school would be more important than ever," he said. "We realized that counseling would have to be intensified if FS/EDP were truly going to work."

The group did not feel necessarily that the counseling staff would have to be enlarged. It believed that if the staff were relieved from clerical and record-keeping chores, they would have the time to provide the higher level of counseling required. This was the policy that was followed. The

Students are encouraged to discuss their plans with their teachers.

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An effort is made to give students thorough information about their many options. Teachers brief their classes. Students are seen individually by a guidance counselor at least twice a year. Counselors are on duty two evenings a week to make it easier for parents to arrange conferences.

high school guidance and counseling staff remained at five, and some of their desk work was passed on to workers in the school office.

It was also recognized early that parents of high school students would have a more important role.

"Some students would have no difficulty coping with the flexibility of the new program. Others would," said Mr. Dorsey. "It would be important for them to receive advice and guidance from their parents as well as from the professional counseling staff at the high school."

One of the keystones of the Shrewsbury Plan was that guidance and counseling could not be considered a supplemental or peripheral service; the very nature of the program insisted that it be an integral part of the educational experience.

"Can you imagine?" one guidance counselor remarked to a colleague with an air of mock amazement. "Now we're actually going to have to talk to students instead of maintaining records!" Talk to every student, as a matter of fact.

After much discussion a guidance and counseling program was designed that would provide students with the assistance they needed, with particular emphasis on those times when they would have to consider choosing courses and making other decisions about their education.

The program is simple and straightforward. In the spring an orientation program is prepared for each class, with talks, discussions, and displays. Not only the guidance and counseling staff participates; faculty members and department heads have important assignments. Department heads give talks to each class. Booths are set up in the cafeteria and students are urged to stop by to confer with department heads and teachers about their programs and courses for the next year.

"In every case our goal is to help the student make the right decisions in light of his abilities, his interests, and a realistic appraisal of his potential," said Mr. Dorsey. "We have students who are thinking of a college program, then a four or five-year professional education. Others can't wait to get out of school and find a job, today if possible. In every case we try to make the student's high school education relevant and meaningful."

During the year every student is seen by a counselor twice. Some students with special problems or difficulties are seen more frequently. Students are invited to take the initiative and see a counselor if they feel a need, and faculty members are reminded to keep the counseling department informed about any student who should talk to a counselor. Additionally, staff members are available at the high school two evenings a week for conferences with students and their parents.

The school insists that after a student has chosen courses for the following term and worked out his schedule, he discuss the program with his parents and have it approved by them.

"The system has worked well," said Mr. Dorsey. "We have students who move along smoothly on their own. The great majority do fine with just a minimum of counseling. A few need intensive counseling, and we try to give it to them."

The first year's experience was judged satisfactory. Nevertheless, an effort is being made to strengthen the program in a few areas, particularly for terminal students who may be tempted to drop out or, on the contrary, might be persuaded that there is merit in going on for more education after high school. Also, a stronger informational program is planned to make parents aware of the counseling services, especially the availability of counseling in the evening. ■

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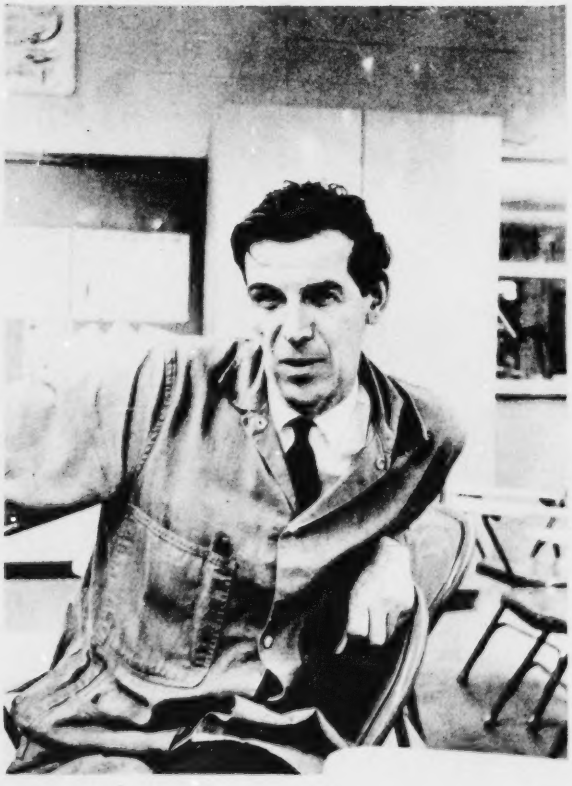
Most People Are Happy; A Few Aren't



Teacher Ernest Miller, president of the Shrewsbury Teachers Association, expresses some reservations about the program, but feels it has been more successful than expected.

Superintendent Agard describes the Shrewsbury Plan as evolutionary rather than revolutionary, meaning that it is a logical extension of a long series of innovations in public education rather than the rejection of an established system in favor of something dramatically new.

Nevertheless, the Shrewsbury Plan as it took shape in the minds of its designers was a significant departure from anything that anybody in town had any experience with, and although it moved smoothly through several key stages - first, approval by the School Committee, then by the Massachusetts Department of Education -- a number of townspeople, certainly some teachers and parents if not many students, took a dim view of Flexible Scheduling/Extended Day Program as September, 1972 approached. Intermingled with the comments of optimism and hope were notes of doubt and misgiving in the weeks and days before the opening of the school year and the launching of the new program.

"We expected some criticism," says Mr. Agard. "After all, the whole thing was brand-new. We knew we would have to acquire experience with it in order to pinpoint the problems and correct them."

The aspects under question had been clearly pinpointed from the very beginning. Some parents, for instance, were afraid that the "fifth-day" -- the free day -- would be a further opportunity for children to get into trouble, or, at the least, to waste their time. They wondered whether the children would be capable of the additional responsibility and initiative the new program would require of them in order to make the most of its potential. A few were afraid that the heterogeneous grouping of students in some classes would work to the disadvantage of both the gifted and the slow. And here and there the question was asked whether students would have a harder time being accepted by colleges and universities of their choice in view of the experimental nature of the program. And there was still other misgivings.

Some teachers saw dark clouds of their own. Among a number of them was resentment that they had not played a stronger role in the formulation of the program. Some felt that shortening the school week would weaken the motivation of students, and that students would study less because of the elimination of study periods. Heterogeneous grouping might make their job more difficult. And there was a notion some teachers felt threatened: required courses of the past would no longer be required; would teachers who had enjoyed the security of "guaranteed" class enrollments year after year fare as well with a greatly liberalized curriculum in which students could pick and choose with unparalleled freedom?

It was a rare person who didn't feel a special quiver of excitement on Sept. 6, the first day of school.

School committeeman Leo Corazzini made it a point to be on hand to see how things would go. "Everything worked very smoothly," he says. "And this is what most of us expected. After all, there were 400 fewer students!"

The committee chairman, Mrs. Nora Hakim, considered it a truly momentous day. "To change institutions is a huge task. Change is very difficult and is resisted. I felt we had effected a very significant change for the better. It was a genuine b eak-through."

As days, then weeks and months passed, the Shrewsbury

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It didn't take the students long to appreciate the merits of the new program.

Plan became more comfortable for everybody. Necessary adjustments were made, and it wasn't long before the program was functioning smoothly.

"As every month went by the strong points of the program became clearer and more and more of the misgivings subsided," says Theodore Lekas, the high school principal.

Mr. Agard points out a fact that established itself early. "The students were the first to catch on to the merits of the new program," he says. "They recognized quickly that this was a better deal for them."

Certainly the new program never would have had a chance to prove itself without the cooperation of the high school staff. Teachers, despite reservations already described, showed themselves willing to give the program a fair try. School administrators are quick to cite the faculty's open-mindedness as a definite plus.

By the end of the school year it was generally accepted that the Shrewsbury Plan was here to stay. The Mass. Department of Education might still call it an experimental, "pilot" program. But the great majority of people immediately involved were satisfied that the Shrewsbury Plan was meeting its objective and constituted a true improvement.

There are still occasional complaints and criticisms, but they are becoming rarer. Some townspeople still don't realize it is perfectly legal for students - in fact for 20 percent of them to be out of school on a week-day.

Some people feel that the Career Opportunity Experience, which now involves one sixteenth of all students, should be made available to more students. Others insist that the guidance and counseling program should be strengthened because teen-agers can't cope with the wide choice of courses.

And others point out that Flexible Scheduling isn't as flexible as it sounds: one mother said her son couldn't take science except in Block B, the late afternoon school session, which kept him from participating in school sports.

Ernest Miller, a junior high school teacher with 24 years of classroom experience who is president of the Shrewsbury Teachers Association, expresses some reservations, particularly about the difficulty of individualizing instruction in large classes, but says, "Once the program got under way, teachers' complaints dried up. There's a top-notch staff in the high school, and they made the program work. In fact, I think it worked out better than people thought it would."

Before the first year was over a study of the program was conducted by Norman G. Limoges of the high school guidance and counseling department. He distributed a questionnaire to a random sample of 200 students and to their parents as well as to all 95 teachers on the high school faculty. It contained a dozen questions. Responses were mixed. The final question was, "If you could, would you choose to return to the former system?"

All three groups answered no. Teachers by 24 to 20. Parents by 41 to 21. And students by 89 to 4.

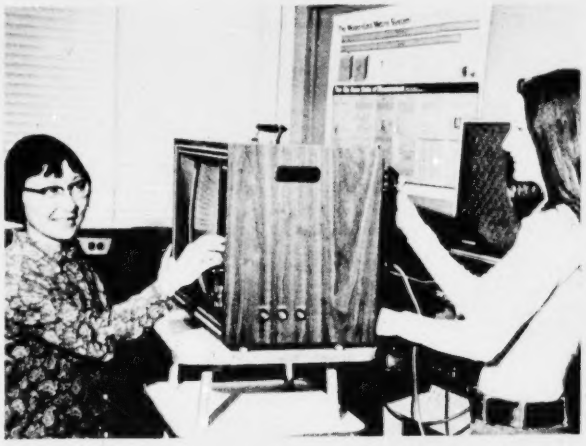
And Mr. Limoges felt that the consensus would become even more emphatic eventually. In his analysis of the results he wrote, "I am very optimistic that with time much of the opposition. . . will decrease as the positive effects begin to become obvious."

Another study was conducted by a nine-member Citizens Advisory Group to the town schools. The CAG interviewed students, teachers, and parents. It prepared a detailed report which was mailed to all parents of children in the high school and the junior high school. The report said in part:

"It is the unanimous opinion of the CAG that the new FS/EDP program. . . is a program with almost unlimited and very exciting educational opportunities for high school students in Shrewsbury. While we recognize that certain 'bugs' must be worked out of the system, we feel that even the first year was one of great accomplishment.

"Further, we did not find any existing problems which seemed insurmountable if administration, faculty, students, parents, and citizens are willing to accept the changes and make them work."

In "The 1973 Colonial," the school yearbook, seniors said the same thing, if more lightly and with a chuckle here and there. They made FS/EDP the theme of the yearbook and devoted an entire section to it, saying at one point: "We don't want to give the impression that the new schedule has caused Shrewsbury High a lot of problems or has turned the school into a zoo. We make fun of the new system, because it has worked so well. . ." ■



Adults and teen-agers study side by side in evening classes.

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Mrs. Nora Hakim

Mr. Leo R. Corazzini

The Key Insiders . . . and

Talk to the people who hammered out the details of the Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program and you will find it difficult to determine who should get credit for conceiving this feature or that one.

All of them insist that from beginning to end it was a team effort.

"Having a vision is one thing, and turning it into reality is another," says Mrs. Nora Hakim, chairman of the School Committee at the time. "We were very fortunate. There happened to be enough inspired people in Shrewsbury at the right time to envision a creative solution to several problems and then bring it about."

"You might call it a six-month brain-storming experience," says Theodore Lekas, the high school principal. "We had a steering committee of competent people. One member would make a suggestion, and somebody else would add a refinement. That's the way we worked."

Irving H. Agard, the school superintendent, who was chairman of the steering committee, says the enthusiasm of the School Committee had much to do with getting the Shrewsbury Plan off the drawing board.

"The committee meets every other Wednesday," he says. "From October, 1971, to May, 1972, the period when we were designing FS/EDP, the program was Item 1 on the agenda at every single committee meeting. The School Committee kept prodding us, encouraging us, forcing us to think out every detail. It was a case of creative leadership."

Administrators were directed by the School Committee in October to consider the alternatives which would solve the space problem and at the same time improve the pupils' learning experience. Immediately a steering committee was formed. It included four members: Mr. Agard, Mr. Lekas, Joseph J. Montecalvo, high school vice principal, and James J. Dorsey, Jr., director of pupil personnel services. The committee met weekly throughout the school year and continued to function even after the School Committee approved its concept of FS/EDP and ordered the program put into effect. Indeed, the steering committee still exists, with a larger membership now, its role being to oversee the functioning of the program and to suggest appropriate modifications as they appear necessary.

Observers in town note that the steering committee had a happy balance: Mr. Agard and Mr. Dorsey had had many years of experience in school administration and curriculum development. Mr. Lekas and Mr. Montecalvo were relatively new to their responsibilities as principal and vice principal of the high school. "There was a lot of enthusiasm," one man said. "If the same group had tackled the job five years later, the project might have suffered from tired blood. As it was, the committee felt it had a tiger by the tail, and obviously enjoyed swinging it."

The steering committee set aside a morning every week for its meetings. In the beginning it tried several locales, but felt bothered by distractions and interruptions. Soon it moved its deliberations to the White Brick Building, which had previously served as school department headquarters and now provided supplemental office space for a half dozen administrators. The committee found the White Brick Building's quiet just what it needed.

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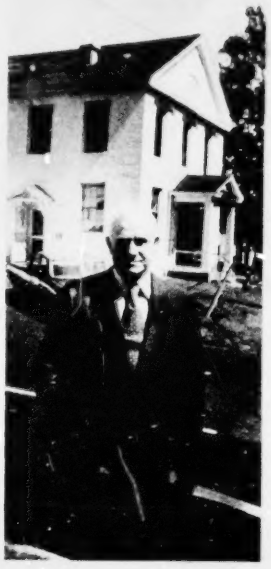
Supt. Irving Agard (l.) and the new curriculum coordinator, Dr. William A. Clark.



Mr. James Dorsey
Director
Pupil Personnel Services

Mr. Theodore Lekas, high school principal (l.), and Mr. Joseph J. Montecalvo, vice principal.

How They Worked Together

The four men were scheduled to work from 9 to noon, but often they worked on till 1 or 1:30 p.m., or continued their discussion at lunch together.

Several of the key features of the program which they were developing had been tried in the high school previously. Indeed, they were being incorporated into the program because they had been successful. One was the Career Opportunity Experience. Another had been evening classes. A third was the staggered starting time, with some students beginning school at 8 a.m. and others at 9 a.m.

"We knew where we wanted to go," said Mr. Agard. "The big difficulty was finding a practical way to get there."

The four men tackled the problems one by one, each making suggestions or criticisms from his personal experience or insight. Additionally, as the discussions continued, each member assumed specific responsibilities.

Mr. Dorsey was particularly interested in curriculum development and pressed for a much greater variety of courses at varying levels of difficulty. Eventually the curriculum was expanded from 90 offerings to more than 200.

"Jim was our conscience," says Mr. Agard. "If we added a new course for above-average students, he would insist we put in one for low achievers, too. He maintained a very broad view."

Mr. Montecalvo wound up with the responsibility of making "flexible schedule" work. It was his job to convert ideas into specific time blocks. He developed a display board with moveable cards which represented courses. Eventually he moved his board into the White Brick Building to better convince his colleagues that a good idea on paper could easily become a scheduling impossibility. The board simplified the work.

Mr. Lekas took on a difficult job of another kind. It became his assignment to organize meetings with parents, students, and department heads which would keep them informed and at the same time provide feed-back for the steering committee. For instance, he held two assemblies with each of the first three high school classes. It was thanks to such meetings that the steering committee soon came to feel that the town would accept the concept of FS/EDP.

Superintendent Agard refuses to take credit for any of the steering committee's achievements. With one exception. "September was coming fast. I had a timetable and insisted that it be met," he says simply. "And as we proceeded with our work, I made sure that the School Committee and the Massachusetts Department of Education were kept thoroughly informed."

Not everything went smoothly. Often interesting suggestions petered out when they were put to the test of practicality. The School Committee insisted on detailed reports at its meetings and sometimes made one member or another of the steering committee strain to explain facets of its thinking as they appeared before the group. "We went back to the drawing board time and again," says Mr. Lekas.

It was a tall order. The men who were involved felt from their first meeting that they could get the job done. But none of them suspected he'd have so much fun meeting the challenge. ■

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How Boston Officialdom Looks at All This

In Massachusetts cities and towns the School Committee sets policy. But the Massachusetts Department of Education fixes the standards which every School Committee must meet.

It was one thing for the Shrewsbury School Committee in October, 1971, to authorize an ad hoc steering committee to explore alternate methods of solving problems facing the high school. It was a completely different matter to persuade the State Department of Education to go along should the steering committee come up with a program that departed from the state's stringent guidelines.

The School Committee and school administrators were aware that they would have to keep the Department of Education informed of every step in the development of the new program. In fact, it was decided to solicit the advice and support of the department at every step and to interest it in the town's progress in solving its problems.

As it turned out, it was an appropriate decision, for the four-day-week feature which became an essential element of the FS/EDP required a state dispensation from the requirement that students attend school five days a week. Unless the State Department of Education granted the town a waiver, the Shrewsbury Plan could never mature from a drawing board program to a classroom reality.

The State Department of Education did take far more than casual interest. Through its regional office in nearby West Boylston it kept a sharp eye on the steering committee's doings. Regional administrators stopped by frequently, asked innumerable questions, studied reports, and demanded assurance that students would not be short-changed in any way in the evolving program. Town administrators appreciated the state's concern; in fact, they felt the same way: if anything, they wanted a program that would provide the high school students with a superior education.

Irving H. Agard, the school superintendent, kept a steady stream of reports flowing to West Boylston and Boston. At one meeting of the steering committee with the regional administrators he made a list of questions that his people had a tough time answering. After the meeting he sat down with his committee and worked out precise answers. They were in the next mail.

"The Department had a lot of vision," he says today. "It takes courage to endorse something experimental because the experimental can be disastrous. You've heard of the Detroit people who were afraid to back the Mustang because of the Edsel. It could have been like that in the Department. But it wasn't."

He insists on giving credit to two regional administrators, John J. Collins, the regional coordinator, and David L. Backlin, senior supervisor for secondary education.

"They worked with us all the way," Mr. Agard says.

After listening to the town's arguments and studying its dossier of documents, the Department granted Shrewsbury a one year waiver. It later renewed the waiver for another year. State approval will continue to be necessary; the town hopes that the Department will give it a multi-year waiver the next time around.

When the State Board of Education voted unanimous approval on April 25, 1972, Dr. Neil V. Sullivan, state commissioner of education, wrote: "This is an opportunity for us to be truly creative in our dealings with individual schools. I hope that we can pass some of Shrewsbury's experiences on to other schools in the Commonwealth in the near future.

"The diversity and specialization for both staff and students, as well as the chance to expand the educational experience beyond school walls, reflect what is needed in public secondary school education right now."

He said that the board was particularly interested in the possibilities of the Career Opportunity Experience. The board's interest led it to designate Shrewsbury High School as a department pilot program school. Dr. Gregory Anrig, the new commissioner, views the program with the same interest.

FS/EDP continues to be monitored regularly by state officials. They scrutinize every aspect of the program, from student tardiness to curriculum development.

"I think that overall the Shrewsbury Plan has been very successful," says Mr. Backlin, whose responsibility it has been to survey the program for the Commonwealth and prepare departmental reports. "It is accomplishing what it set out to do."

Shrewsbury administrators continue to work closely with the State Department of Education in an effort not only to observe all guidelines but to make the findings of their own experience available to other communities. ■

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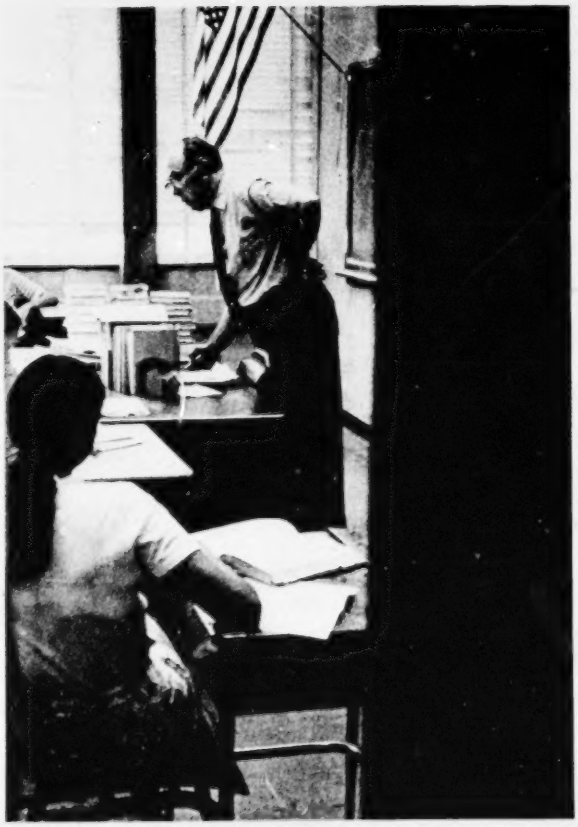
Is This the End? Or Just the Beginning?



Already some innovations have been introduced successfully in the Junior High School.

Many people look at the Shrewsbury Plan and speculate whether it's an experiment which proved itself and will continue to function within the shape that it has taken, or merely a step toward something else.

There are people with both views, yet it's difficult to listen to those who hold the second view and not share their hunch that the innovations of the Shrewsbury Plan hold promise for still more improvements.

The argument is simple: the proper role of education is to prepare children to become breadwinners, parents, and citizens, and indeed to improve their quality of life. The Shrewsbury Plan already is providing a better education -- that is, a better preparation for adulthood -- for the teenagers in town, and it has the potential to do even more for a greater range of people.

"Already I've seen some very interesting results," says James J. Dorsey, Jr., director of pupil personnel services, "and I believe still others are in the offing."

He points out, for instance, that the success of FS/EDP in the high school has led to a greater flexibility in the junior high school. Students there now have more choice in their language and social studies courses, and according to Mr. Dorsey, their interest and motivation are improved. Some junior high students are taking high school courses, and if anything, are thriving on the accelerated diet.

He sees no reason why the school's offerings cannot be opened completely to the adult community.

"The day will come when men and women who are interested in certain subjects or in complete programs will study side by side in the classroom with our teen-agers. And why not?"

Already this is coming to pass, with a small number of

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adults enrolled in the high school.

Another who shares his optimism is Theodore Lekas, the high school principal. "We have just started on a new road," he says. "We will discover many new and interesting things."

Perhaps most enthusiastic of all is Joseph Montecalvo, vice principal of the high school. Like Mr. Lekas and Mr. Dorsey, he was a member of the task force which forged FS/EDP. His specific responsibility since the beginning of the program has been to direct the scheduling of courses, teachers, and students.

"In my mind this is just a stepping stone," he says. "It will lead naturally and logically to other changes.

"In fact, I think of the Shrewsbury Plan as we know it now as Phase I. Phase II would be to apply the advantages of the system to students in the junior high school also. And Phase III would be an open-community educational system. Anybody who wanted to learn would be welcome, whether he was 16 or 60."

He points to Career Opportunity Experience as a direction more students should take. "We'll stop thinking in terms of schoolhouses and will realize more and more that the community is also a good place for people to learn."

Mrs. Nora Hakim, a School Committee member who was chairman when the program was developed and begun, believes that the Shrewsbury Plan by its very nature is flexible and changeable.

"What we've shown is that the educational system should grow and evolve continuously in response to the needs of the community. The old framework was too rigid."

Leo Corazzini, the present committee chairman, takes a practical view. "We're very satisfied with the way the program has worked out," he says. "It could be just a temporary solution, or it could turn out to be permanent. It all depends on the needs of our students in the years ahead. The truth is: who knows?"

The school superintendent, Irving Agard, takes a moderate public stance. "We've never suggested we're Messiahs," he says. "FS/EDP has been excellent, but I'm not prepared to say it's the right thing for every other community. Different communities have different needs."

Yet privately he can't help show his enthusiasm and excitement.

"One of the things the Shrewsbury Plan has shown is that a school system need not have a desk and a chair for every child. The four-day week and the extended day have shown that students can be accommodated more efficiently than that, the financial implications are very interesting.

"It has also shown, I'm convinced, that it provides a more individual consideration of each student's needs. We now have a system which can be more responsive to the requirements of every student, whether he's slow or fast, whether interested in a college prep program or vocational training, or feels certain of his career choice or wants to look into various options before making up his mind."

Certainly the Shrewsbury Plan has evoked much interest in other educational quarters. The Massachusetts Depart-

The big question the plan sought to answer was . . .

How to make high school education better?

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ment of Education thought enough of the original proposal to grant the town a one-year waiver from the normal requirement for a five-day school week. Then it showed itself sufficiently satisfied with the findings of the first year's experience to extend the waiver for another year.

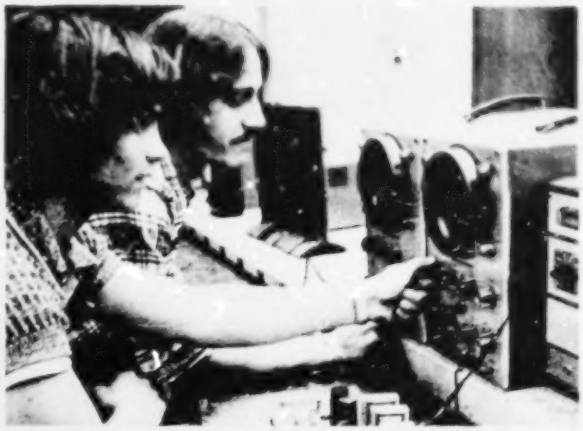
And a growing list of communities, some in Massachusetts and some in distant states, have shown interest. Some have requested details of the program, others have sent representatives to take a look at the program for a day or several days, still others have invited Shrewsbury educators to visit their own school systems and determine whether the Shrewsbury Plan might be a worthwhile alternative.

One community, the town of Barnstable on Cape Cod, has opted to try the Shrewsbury Plan in its own high school and has received permission from the Massachusetts Department of Education. It launched its program in September, 1973. Other communities may adopt the plan.

In essence the Shrewsbury Plan has a dual appeal. On the one hand, it makes more efficient use of a school building. On the other, it gives every student a better opportunity to satisfy his educational requirements, all while permitting him to carry a program which, while full, keeps him in school fewer hours and thus provides time for educational experiences outside the school.

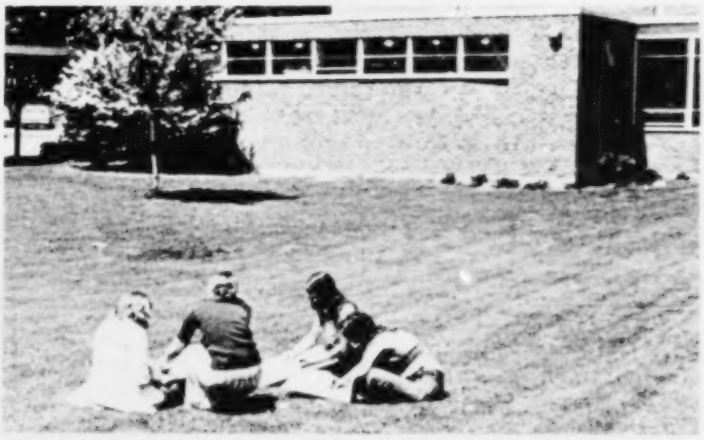
Is the Shrewsbury Plan the end? Or just a beginning? Most people who have taken a close look at it would tell you it's the latter.

To them it opened an interesting new door. And suddenly they've seen more doors that appear promising. ■



There's greater opportunity to experiment.

The student's individuality is stressed.



What has taken place in Shrewsbury has interested educators and school committee people in other communities.

The Chairmen Comment

Mrs. Nora Hakim
Chairman 1971-72

"Never in the history of the world," has said Dr. G. Brook Chisolm, psychiatrist and former Director General of the World Health Organization, "have there been enough mature people in the right places at the right time."

The educational year of 1971-72 in Shrewsbury was, in my opinion, one of those rare occasions when there were enough mature people in key places at the right time -- inspired, enlightened, ready, and willing to take a calculated risk in new and promising directions.

The immediate catalyst was overcrowding. The vision for unlocking and enhancing the school curriculum was a long-fermenting dream. The school schedule was the instrument.

With an integrated concept of what could be, the School Committee mandated exploring new solutions.

It worked! Not only to extend space economically (in an era of erratic enrollment patterns) but *simultaneously* to expand the curriculum into an open sesame to alternatives in education for students, faculty, and community.

Shrewsbury, by creatively meeting its own needs, has made a significant breakthrough into new levels of potential -- the capability to meet

an infinite variety of people needs. And without solicitation, it has been catapulted from a water-treading to a leadership status in education.

"Would you do it all over again?" I have been asked. The answer is, for my part, an emphatic yes!

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Mr. Leo R. Corazzini
Chairman 1973

The Shrewsbury Plan has been a pleasant surprise. It was so novel that I had expected more problems. But by and large the problems that did come up were not grave. They have been solved one by one.

I think the Shrewsbury Plan was the right solution for Shrewsbury. There were other possible solutions to our space problem, but they would not have been as effective. In the late 1950's we had double-sessions, but they were hard for everybody to live with. At one time I was intrigued with the possibilities of a full-year school, but I don't think it was a concept suitable for our community.

What made the transition so much easier is that several key elements of the Shrewsbury Plan had been tried earlier in Shrewsbury and been found desirable: evening programs for high school students, for instance, and the Career Opportunity Experience program. The idea of the four-day week had been suggested several years ago by School Committeeman Robert Lutz. The Shrewsbury Plan integrated these and other elements into a single concept.

It took the cooperation of many people to make it possible, including students, parents, and teachers.

The students can get much out of this program. But will they? They have to have a sense of responsibility, for more is left to them. This is why the guidance program is so important. A few students will try to beat the system. But I think most students by far will find the new program better. We'll know in a few years.

In fact, as the father of three children, I'm excited that they are going into this program.

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We only learn in the presence of limits, which is another way of saying that there is no learning without structure. One of the limits which we all regret and resent at one time or another is the limitation of funds; money is in short supply, and School Committee members, administrators and teachers have all lamented this melancholy fact, although as taxpayers they may lament increasing taxes even more.

Instead of making the limits of funding a cause for complaint, some educators like Superintendent Irving Agard and Principal Theodore Lekas have seized the opportunity to lead their schools into new patterns of organization which re-distribute the funds (and therefore the energy) available for educational purposes. The courage and imagination needed for this should not be underestimated since we all prefer the structures that we know; and yet together the Shrewsbury School District has turned a difficulty into an opportunity, a problem into a promise.

The principles of the Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program are simple and obvious to common sense, and yet educators have resisted them in the past, and may not even have been aware of them. Thanks to the leadership provided under the Shrewsbury School Committee, we shall never be able to say again that there is no alternative pattern available for schools, that without limitless funds the educational task is impossible. I regard the Flexible Schedule/Extended Day Program as a major breakthrough in education, since it shows that by providing new structures we can still achieve educational excellence within reasonable budgetary limits. What is of greater importance, perhaps, is the fact the students find greater satisfaction in learning as their responsibility increases.

John Bremer
Commissioner of Education
British Columbia, Canada

British-born John Bremer became internationally known for his pioneering Parkway Program in Philadelphia. Since then he has served on the faculty of Newton (Mass.) College of the Sacred Heart and Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, before becoming the Commissioner of Education for British Columbia. He is author of "School Without Walls" and (with Jean Bremer) of "Open Education." He has acted as consultant to Shrewsbury Schools since 1971.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

1971	1972	1973
Mrs. Nora A. Hakim, Chairman	Mrs. Nora A. Hakim, Chairman	Mr. Leo R. Corazzini, Chairman
Mrs. Frances C. Whitney, Secretary	Mr. Robert J. Cormier, Vice Chairman	Mr. Chandler P. Creedon, Vice Chairman
Mr. Robert F. Lutz	Mr. Leo R. Corazzini, Secretary	Mr. Robert O. Comeau, Secretary
Mr. Leo R. Corazzini	Mrs. Frances C. Whitney	Mrs. Nora A. Hakim
Mr. Robert J. Cormier	Mr. Robert O. Comeau	Mr. Robert J. Cormier

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"There are many problems to be worked out, and we're sure they will be in time. We don't want to give the impression that the new schedule has caused Shrewsbury High a lot of problems or has turned the school into a zoo. We make fun of the new system, because it has worked so well, and because it does have crazy problems and creates strange situations."

THE COLONIAL

'73 High School Yearbook